

14 August 2013

The Honorable Judge David D. Dowd, Jr.
John F. Seiberling Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse
Two South Main Street, Room 402
Akron, Ohio 44308-1813

Judge Dowd,

I am writing this letter of support for Mr. Joshua Stafford, who is scheduled to be sentenced on September 11th of this year after being found guilty at trial in your court. I humbly request leniency and compassion in your sentencing decision.


I have been in correspondence with Mr. Stafford since shortly after his arrest in 2012. He has shown himself to be a thoughtful, intelligent, and considerate person in this correspondence. I have also heard from friends who have been able to visit him in jail that he is caring and principled.

Recently, I have received a couple letters from him in which he has expressed a great deal of insight into his situation and reflections on his legal case and the consequences of his conviction. I sincerely believe that he represented himself as honestly and effectively as he was able to at trial. While his charges and his conviction by a jury are both serious matters, I hope that your review of the totality of his situation will show that justice requires leniency in his sentencing.

In his letters, Mr. Stafford has expressed his willingness to serve the sentence that is given to him. I believe he will do so in a way that helps him set his life on a good course upon his release. However, his life course would be best for him, his community, and society at large if he were to be quickly reunited with his community so he can continue contributing to it in healthy and positive ways.

As you determine his sentence, please consider the overall good that would come about from him being reintegrated into the community sooner rather than later, as he has a lot of potential that would be squandered if he were to serve an undue time behind bars.

Sincerely,



Jude Ortiz

939 N. Western Ave, #2F
Chicago, IL 60622

Sept. 1, 2013

The Honorable David D. Dowd Jr.
U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio
Two South Main Street, Room 402
Akron, Ohio 44308-1813

Re: Sentencing of Joshua Stafford

Dear Judge Dowd,

I write in support of a lenient, merciful sentence for Joshua Stafford. I met Joshua in the fall of 2011, a quiet, introverted young man. From that point until his arrest in May of 2012, I saw him in the community probably a dozen times or more, always very quiet.


I feel that he was overly susceptible to an unhealthy situation in the Spring of 2012. He was immature and susceptible, and from what I think I have learned after, he was suffering from mental health issues. I did not know what he was going through until I learned of the unfortunate situation about his arrest, etc.

I feel that definitely he has a larger community of friends that care and will help him to integrate peacefully into society upon his release. We do care very much.

I feel that he has now gained perspective and would not do anything to harm anyone.

Please do consider this young man's life and the opportunities that we wish to provide for young people to have good futures, and the possibility of people to reform and overcome much of their pasts. Joshua has had much reason to reflect and reform and people who are rooting for him to be good and have a good life.

Thank you very much,


Kathy Smith
3188 W. 14th #3
Cleveland, Ohio 44109

August 30th, 2013

The Honorable David D. David Jr.
U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio
Two South Main Street, Room 402
Akron, Ohio 44308-1813

Re: Sentencing of Joshua Stafford

Dear Judge David,

My name is Sydney Altenhof and I am a local activist from Cleveland, Ohio. I know Josh from rallies, protests and other organising activities. Josh is a very kind, intelligent and giving individual to this day and was always an enthusiastic helper during Occupy Cleveland.

I think it would be both beneficial and proactive if Josh was assigned to a medical facility nearest Northeast Ohio so he can continue to easily get the support he needs from his friends, family members and other medical personnel that would be able to assist him.

I do not believe Josh is a threat to anyone or himself. Again, he is an incredibly kind individual just struggling through life. I believe if he is transferred to a proper place, he will be able to meet more of his potential. I will continue to stand by Josh and support him because I trust him and consider him a friend.

Thanks for your consideration,

Sydney Altenhof

September 1st, 2013

The Honorable David D. David, Jr.

US District Court for the Northern District of Ohio

Two South Main Street, Room 402

Akron, Ohio 44308-1813

Re: Sentencing of Joshua Stafford

Dear Judge David,

Over the course of a series of years I have had the opportunity to become acquainted with Joshua in a variety of ways, and one thing has become clear. Regardless of the charges that he currently stands convicted of, Joshua has shown himself to be a caring person, who always took time to be concerned for others, whether or not he has a direct personal relationship with them or not.

Your honor, clearly the charges Joshua stands convicted of are serious, there is no doubting this, and the possible penalties are severe. However, given my past associations with him, and the level of support Joshua has, I feel that he is not someone that presents a continued threat. There are many people throughout the Cleveland area, myself included, that are dedicated to making sure that he is supported, both during and after his incarceration, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

As I have stated, through my interactions with Joshua he has demonstrated that he is a person that has concern for others, the conditions and events in their

lives, and is dedicated to attempting to remedy situations that may negatively impact those around him. Now, in this case this desire to help others may have meant that he was overly trusting of those around him, and this may have led to him being in this situation, but I sincerely feel that this derives from an underlying good natured spirit and personality.

Given his conviction on the stated charges the possible sentence is incredibly severe, but to impose a harsh sentence does not benefit Joshua or the community at large. As a person who is fundamentally caring of those around him, and as a person who has so much outside support, it is my position that Joshua would benefit from leniency in his sentence, and the ability to put this behind him and move on with his life, with all the support that his friends and loved ones can possibly provide.

Respectfully,

Dr. Thomas Preragastmi

303 Lakewick Lane
Willowick, OH 44095

September 1, 2013

The Honorable Judge David D. Dawson
U.S. District Court for the Northern District of OH
Two South Main St, Room 402
Akron, OH 44308-1813

Re: Sentencing of Joshua Staffero

Dear Judge Dawson,

I am writing on behalf of Joshua Staffero. I have known Joshua through volunteer work in Cleveland, OH. I would like to urge you to assign Joshua to a medical facility, where he can receive good psychiatric care, and preferably to a facility close to Cleveland so that he can continue to receive visits from friends and family. I would also request that you don't apply the terrorism enhancement. Joshua has a strong network of friends and family that support him and will continue too after his release. Joshua has had a long history of mental illness, but is a sweet caring individual. Please consider these requests. Thank you
Jocelyn Kirkwood

September 10th, 2013

The Honorable David D. Dowd Jr.
U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio
Two South Main Street, Room 402
Akron, Ohio 44308-1813

Re: Sentencing of Joshua Stafford

Dear Judge Dowd,

This has been one of the most difficult letters I've written in my life. Had you asked me about my involvement in politics on October 5th, 2011 I'd have expressed hopelessness, indifference and apathy. On October 6th I stopped by Willard Park on my way home from work. In conversations with the other people there I found shared frustration with the state of our world, but also the kind of hope for a better world that motivated me to develop the skills and determination to create a more just future. I was in the same boat as a lot of people who lived in that first tent-city; new to activism and learning as we went.

I still carry the hope, motivation and sense of empowerment I found there: one of the first things I learned was to stop waiting for someone to tell me how to fix things (or who I should vote for to get them done). Instead, I look at problems people around me are facing and ask 'what needs to be done?' We didn't fix Cleveland's woes overnight, but (among other things) I helped keep a family in their home for Christmas and worked to raise awareness of illegal foreclosures by many of the same banks that we bailed out.

Despite the disparaging reports, those of us who could find work did it; we were taking on activism as a second (or third) job. Those who couldn't find work (like so many in our shrinking city) were putting in what would have been 60-80 hour work weeks to build a world that worked for people rather than banks. We struggled within the group with decisions as to how best to support the vulnerable people we worked with every day. For our youngest members this was often their first experience living away from home; for Josh, and far too many others, their lives had been lived with very little to call 'home'.

I have known Josh since those first days of Occupy, when everything seemed so hopeful. He was quiet, and I believe most regulars were aware that he had severe mental health issues. He was also fiercely, but non-violently, protective of his friends and what became his extended Occupy family, who shared the following stories with me:

- Josh stepped in between Rachel and a car she hadn't seen coming. This may seem small, but when I asked people what I should write to you about, this is what came up over and over: humble acts of selflessness, and a willingness to put himself in the way of danger.
- Josh stood up to bullies, including defusing incidents of harassment at the tent. He stepped in to prevent people from harassing Robin, a woman who faces regular and sometimes violent street harassment for being transgender.
- When hiking with Josh in early spring, Jonnie fell into a cold stream. Without hesitation Josh risked himself to pull Jonnie to safety.
- The walkie-talkies used to paint him as part of a dangerous sub-group? Those were handed out to people who held night watch over our camp as it became too large to see from one end to the next. Josh was always one of the first to volunteer - meaning he'd be up all night and often working into the next day.
- There was never a job that was beneath him. Even the dishes. As the people who received four large tubs of largely dirty dishes, my boyfriend and I have committed to saving a set of the dishes for each of the guys. It's a small thing, but part of a larger commitment by the community Josh served to make sure he is supported in reintegrating into society when he gets out.

Josh is a person who repeatedly chose to put himself in harm's way to protect others and to de-escalate situations rather than use violence. Josh is also someone who has difficult family relationships, and has built a chosen family of friends that supports him. As someone who cares deeply for his friends, I believe he was also too easily influenced by them. I know that as May 1st neared he had complained about not ever getting to go with the other guys, and along with the call of his near-bottomless stomach I believe he let his faith in his friends lead him into a terrible situation.

Since his imprisonment I have come to know Josh in a different way: through several inches of glass. Not right after, I was too angry; but over several months leading up to the trial, as well as after his conviction, I visited nearly every week. I got to be familiar with explaining the difference between sane and competent. I attended the competency hearing and portions of the trial, and heard his reactions. I am grateful for a system that allowed analysis from a respected psychologist he could trust as much as possible. You have greater access to his history than I do, but clearly it was horrific.

I am not a lawyer, and I don't understand the standard for pro se representation. I would not presume to second-guess Your Honor in a matter of law. However, as someone who visited him leading up to, right before and right after the trial perhaps I can provide some insight as to why he went from avid studying to withdrawal (nearly refusing to come to court after the first day): I don't believe that, deep down, he understood that in real life court didn't work like it does TV. That he isn't going to be able to pull out his text messages and say 'look, you can see I didn't know the plot was real at all!'

I understand the trouble he's in is not to be taken lightly, and I don't think he takes it lightly. I also believe that he is, at worst, a danger to himself. He has vowed to refuse medical psychiatric treatment, but I hope he serves his time in a facility that gives him access to treatments like behavioral therapy. Of all the defendants in this trial, I believe he is the least culpable. I won't claim he's the most repentant... at least at face value. I am not a psychologist, but I believe his adamant refusal to acknowledge guilt is the best apology he can give. He can't bear to see himself as the kind of person who would do such a thing, and he risked decades at trial – when it made no sense to do so - to prove that to himself and the world.

In terms of capacity and intent, he was a guy who trusted people he thought of as friends more than he should. He could never have initiated the plot, nor taken any of the crucial acts necessary to advance the plot on his own. (He wasn't even present for most of them.) When he is released into society, particularly if that happens as soon as possible, he will have access to a broad support network. Being either in an appropriate medical facility or nearby the Cleveland area will help us support Josh in living on his own again after he has served his sentence.

I know that we are a country that rewards repentance. It will be hard to see in a guy who blames everyone but himself (his lawyers, Your Honor, possibly me for writing a letter in defiance of his assertion that it would do no good and he'd take whatever sentence he was given). Since long before trial Josh has insisted he is prepared to serve the maximum sentence. It may not be the kind of repentance you usually get: perfectly proof-read, discussed with lawyers and well-designed to persuade the court and the public. However, I believe that his consistently-stated willingness to serve the full sentence should he be found guilty is the strongest repentance he is able to offer given his mental state, and is more genuine than many of the carefully-worded apologies received by the court.

Despite his mental health difficulties, I don't believe this conviction indicates a pattern that will be repeated in his life. Like many young men, he was eager to be led and easily influenced by his friends. I believe someone who will stand between a bully and their victim has the capacity to stand up to peer pressure required to prevent him from being brought into such a situation again. Josh's conscience will be a better deterrent than a long sentence that further isolates him from society.

I hope that the court can take a more nuanced view than Josh's all-or-nothing, black & white view of the world. Due to his capacity for reintegration into the community, his (perhaps unusual) expression of remorse, and especially given his limited involvement in the crime he was convicted of; I humbly ask Your Honor to consider leniency in sentencing. No one who got in a car with the primary thought that they were hungry and getting dinner with friends should serve a sentence intended for someone attempting to wage war on our country.

Respectfully Yours,


Julia Boyd
4210 Franklin Blvd
Cleveland, OH 44113